

From the start, the gods made <b>women</b> different.	
	One type is from a pig—a hairy sow
	whose house is like a rolling heap of filth;
	and she herself, unbathed, in unwashed clothes,
5	reposes on the shit-pile, growing fat.
	Another type the gods made from a fox:
	pure evil, and aware of everything.
	This woman misses nothing: good or bad,
	she notices, considers, and declares
10	that good is bad and bad is good. Her mood
	changes from one moment to the next.

	One type is from a <b>dog</b> —a no-good bitch,
	<b>a mother through and through</b> ; she wants to hear
	everything, know everything, go everywhere,
15	and stick her nose in everything, and bark
	whether she sees anyone or not.
	A man can't stop her barking; not with threats,
	not (when he's had enough) by knocking out
	her teeth with a stone, and not with sweet talk either;
20	<b>even among guests</b> , she'll sit and yap;
	the onslaught of her voice cannot be stopped.

	One type the gods of Mount Olympus crafted
	out of Earth—their gift to man! She’s lame
	and has no sense of either good or bad.
25	She knows no useful skill, except to eat
	<b>—and, when</b> the gods make winter cold and hard,
	to drag her chair up closer to the fire.
	Another type is from the Sea; she’s two-faced.
	One day she’s calm and smiling—any guest
30	who sees her in your home will praise her then:
	“This woman is the best in all the world
	and also the most beautiful.” The next day

	she's wild and unapproachable, unbearable
	even to look at, filled with snapping hate,
35	ferocious, like a bitch with pups, enraged
	at loved ones and at enemies alike.
	Just as the smooth unrippled sea at times
	stands still, a joy to mariners in summer,
	and then at times is wild with pounding waves—
40	This woman's temperament is just like that.
	<b>The ocean has its own perplexing ways.</b>
	Another type is from a drab, gray ass;
	she's used to getting smacked, and won't give in

	until you threaten her and really force her.
45	She'll do her work all right, and won't complain;
	but then she eats all day, all night—she eats
	everything in sight, in every room.
	<b>And when it comes to sex,</b> she's just as bad;
	<b>she welcomes</b> any man that passes by.
50	Another loathsome, miserable type
	is from a weasel: undesirable
	in every way—un-charming, un-alluring.
	She's <b>sex-crazed</b> too; but any man who <b>climbs</b>
	aboard her will get seasick. And she steals

55	from neighbors, and from sacrificial feasts.
	Another type a horse with flowing mane
	gave birth to. <b>She avoids</b> all kinds of work
	and hardship; she would never touch a mill
	or lift a sieve, or throw the shit outside,
60	or sit beside the oven (all that soot!).
	<b>She'll touch her husband only when she has to.</b>
	She washes off her body every day—
	twice, sometimes three times!— then rubs herself
	with perfumed oil. She always wears her hair
65	combed-out, and dressed with overhanging

	flowers.
	Such a wife is beautiful to look at
	for others; for her keeper, <b>she's a pain</b>
	—unless he is a king, or head of state
	who can afford extravagant delights.
70	Another type is from an ape. I'd say
	that <b>Zeus</b> made her the greatest pain of all—
	his gift to man! Her face is hideous.
	This woman is a total laughingstock
	when she walks through the town. She has no neck,
75	no butt—she's all legs. You should see the way

	she moves around. I pity the poor man
	who holds this horrid woman in his arms.
	She's well-versed in every kind of trick
	just like an ape; what's more, she has no shame
80	and doesn't care if people laugh at her.
	She'd never think of doing something kind
	to anyone; she plots the whole day long
	to see how she can do the greatest harm.
	Another type is from a bee. Good luck
85	in finding such a woman! Only she
	deserves to be exempt from <b>stinging blame.</b>



	The household that she manages will thrive;
	a loving wife beside her loving man,
	she'll grow old, having borne illustrious
90	and handsome children; she herself shines bright
	among all women. Grace envelops her.
	She doesn't like to sit with other women
	discussing sex. Zeus gratifies mankind
	with these most excellent and thoughtful wives.
95	But by the grim contrivances of Zeus
	all these other types are here to stay
	side by side with man forever. Yes,

	Zeus made this the greatest pain of all:
	Woman.
	If she seems to want to help
100	that's when she does her keeper the most harm.
	A man who's with a woman can't get through
	a single day without a troubled mind.
	He'll never banish Hunger from his house:
	unwelcome, hateful lodger, hostile god.
105	Just when a man seems most content at home
	and ready for enjoyment, by the grace
	of god or man, that's when she'll pick a

	fight,
	her battle-helmet flashing, full of blame.
	A household with a woman is at a loss
110	to give a decent welcome to a guest.
	The wife who seems the most restrained and good,
	she's the most disastrous of them all;
	for while her slack-jawed husband gapes at her
	the neighbors laugh at how he's been deceived.
115	Each man will diligently praise his own
	and blame the next man's wife; we just don't see
	that we all share alike in this hard luck.

	For Zeus made this the greatest pain of all
	and locked us in a shackle hard as iron
120	and never to be broken, ever since
	the day that Hades opened up his gates
	for all the men who fought <b>that woman's war.</b>

### Translator's Notes

The following works will be referred to in the notes by author's name (or name and date) only:

Campbell, D. A. *Greek Lyric Poetry* (London 1967).

———. review of Lloyd-Jones, *Females of the Species*, *Phoenix* 30 (1976) 97-98.

Gerber, D. E. "Semonides, FR. 7.62," *Phoenix* 28 (1974) 251-53.

———. "Varia Semonidea," *Phoenix* 33 (1979) 19-24.

Hubbard, Thomas K. "Elemental Psychology and the Date of Semonides of Amorgos," *American Journal of Philology* 115.2 (1994) 175-97.

Lattimore, Richmond. "Notes on Greek Poetry," *American Journal of Philology* 65 (1944) 172-75. (172-73 on Semonides 7.57-62)

———. *Greek Lyrics* (Second Edition, Chicago 1960) 8-11. (translation)

Lloyd-Jones, Hugh, ed., trans. & comm. *Females of the Species: Semonides on Women* (Park Ridge 1975).

Renahan, R. "The Early Greek Poets. Some Interpretations," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 87 (1983) 1-29. (11-15 on Semonides 7).

Verdenius, W. J. "Semonides über die Frauen: ein Kommentar zu Fr. 7." *Mnemosyne* 21 (1968) 132-58.

———. "Semonides über die Frauen: Nachtrag zum Kommentar zu Fr.

7.” *Mnemosyne* 22 (1969) 299-301.

———. “Epilegomena zu Semonides Fr. 7.” *Mnemosyne* 30 (1977) 1-12.

Waanders, F. M. J. “A Note on Semonides 7, 53: alênês,” *Mnemosyne* 33 (1980) 347-49.

West, M. L. *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus* (Berlin and New York 1974).

———. *Iambi et Elegi Graeci Ante Alexandrum Cantati* (Second Edition, Oxford 1992). (text)

———. *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford 1993). (translation)

Wooley, A. Review of Heinz Schreckenberg, Ananke (Munich 1964), in *American Journal of Philology* 88 (1967) 230.

My translation follows the text of West 1992, except where noted below. The line numbers given below are those of the English, followed by the line numbers of the Greek text (in parentheses) where different.

**Semonides of Amorgos.** Very little is known about the life of Semonides. The island Amorgos, which lies southeast of Naxos, was colonized by Samians, and some of the ancient sources say that Semonides was originally from Samos. He is usually dated to the seventh century B.C.E., but Hubbard argues persuasively for a sixth century date. By writing abusive verse in iambic meter, Semonides was working in the same poetic tradition as his fellow Ionians Archilochus and Hipponax (see West 1974, 22-39 on the genre known as iambos). Semonides’ language often echoes Homer and Hesiod, and some of the views on women expressed in Poem 7 are comparable to those expressed by Hesiod. This poem was preserved in the anthology compiled by Stobaeus in the fifth century C.E. It is the longest of Semonides’ surviving poems, and indeed the longest surviving non-hexameter poem from before the fifth century B.C.E. (West 1993, xi).

**Line 1 (1-2): “From the start, the gods made women different.”** The word *gynê*, *gynaikos* in Greek means both “woman” and “wife.” A more literal translation of the first sentence: “At the beginning, god made the mind of woman separate (*chôris*).” *Chôris* has been much discussed (separate from each other? separate from men?); I have sought to preserve the ambiguity in my translation.

**Line 13 (12): “a mother through and through.”** The meaning of *automêtora* is disputed. My translation follows the interpretation of Verdenius (1968, 137; following Buchholz-Peppmüller). Other proposed translations include: “the image of her mother” (Campbell 1967), “her mother’s own child” (Lloyd-Jones), and ““giving birth without her husband’s help,’ i.e. promiscuous” (West 1974, 178).

**Line 20 (19): “even among guests.”** The speaker of the poem is somewhat preoccupied with the effect a wife has on a man’s relations with his guests (*xenoi*); compare lines 29 and 109-110 (106-7). The final lines of the poem, with their reference to Helen and the Trojan War, reflect this preoccupation: Paris’ abduction of his host’s wife, and the war that follows, is an extreme case of *xenia* gone wrong, and it leads, ironically, to Hades receiving dead warriors as his guests. See notes on lines 49 and 121-22 (117-18) below.

**Line 26 (25): “–and, when ...”** West’s text, following Ahrens. Others follow Schneidewin’s correction of the text to oud’ ên, “not even when” (i.e., the earth-woman is too sluggish even to pull her chair up when she’s cold).

**Line 41 (42): “The ocean has its own perplexing ways.”** This is a problematic line. The Greek of lines 41–42 seems to mean, “Such a woman is most of all like that [the sea] in temperament (orgê); but the sea has a different appearance (phyê).” So West, in his 1993 verse translation: “That’s what this kind of woman’s like—in mood, / I mean; there’s no resemblance in her looks!” Orgên stands at the beginning of line 42, prominently, in enjambment, followed immediately by phyên de; it certainly looks as if the poet is drawing a contrast between inward disposition and outward form. But for the poet to cap his description of the sea-woman with, “But a large body of salt water is unlike a woman in physical appearance!” seems bizarrely inept. Another approach is to take phyê as a synonym for physis, “inward nature,” and de as a continuing rather than a contrasting particle. Lloyd-Jones, following this course, explains alloiên, “different,” as euphemistic for “different in a sinister way,” and gives parallels; he translates, in his commentary, “‘And the sea has a nature unlike that of other things,’ i.e., a nature that is sinister and uncanny” (73). My translation follows this approach the most closely, although by leaving de untranslated I leave open the possibility that the poet is drawing a contrast between the sea-woman and the sea. A third approach is to emend the text. See Renehan for an overview of proposed solutions (which include deleting the line). Renehan deletes the word orgên, which “perhaps originated as a gloss or variant to phyên, inspired by v. 11,” and inserts allot’ before alloiên (the phrase allot’ alloiên, “changing from one moment to the next,” is also found in line 11). The sense of the line is then that of Lattimore’s translation: “This woman’s disposition is just like the sea’s / since the sea’s temper also changes all the time.” Renehan’s account of how the text could have become corrupted is persuasive, and he may be right, but if he is I feel disappointed in Semonides. Renehan rightly points out that (contrary to received opinion) Semonides is “a more than competent poet,” yet Renehan’s solution seems to me a weak ending to the sea-woman passage.

**Line 48: “And when it comes to sex ...”** The phrases that I have translated as “sex” in this line and in lines 53 and 93 (91) are more colorful in the Greek; they all use the adjective aphrodisios, “having to do with Aphrodite.” In line 48 the phrase is ergon aphrodision, “the work of Aphrodite”; in 53, eunês aphrodisiês, “the bed of Aphrodite”; in 93 (91), aphrodisios logous, “aphrodisiac words.”

**Line 49: “she welcomes ...”** The verb used here (dechomai) is the normal verb for welcoming or receiving a guest. It is also used in lines 110 (107) (“give a decent welcome”) and 121 (117) (“opened up his gates”) below. Cf. notes on lines 20 (19) and 121–22 (117–18). The ass-woman is indiscriminate in her hospitality.

**Line 53: “sex-crazed.”** See note on line 48 above on “sex.” My translation “crazed” follows the manuscript reading alênês. For a proposed etymology of this word (glossed by Hesychius as mainomenos) see Waanders. West accepts the conjecture adênês, “ignorant, inexperienced.” See West (1974) 178 on this and the following line.

**Lines 53–54 (54): “climbs aboard.”** I follow West’s reading, perônta, “crossing over (as in a ferry)” for the nautical metaphor. Others read pareonta, “being present.” Lloyd-Jones, followed by Gerber (1979) 20, takes ton andra ton pareonta to mean either “whatever

husband she has for the time being” or “whatever man is with her,” and attributes the man’s nausea to the weasel-woman’s bad smell. Verdenius (1977) 6 interprets *ton andra ton pareonta* as “Besucher” (guest).

**Line 57 (58): “she avoids ...”** Editors have disagreed as to whether the verb in the manuscripts, *peritrepei*, can mean anything like “avoid.” Various emendations have been proposed. Campbell notes, “either *peritremai* (suggested in L.S.J) or *peritrechei* (Lattimore [1944]) would suit a fastidious mare.” Lloyd-Jones and West 1992 accept the manuscript reading.

**Line 61 (62): “She’ll touch her husband only when she has to.”** The meaning of this line (*anankêi d’ andra poieitai philon*, “she makes a man a *philos* by compulsion [*anankê*]”) is disputed. Gerber (1974) gives an overview of past interpretations, which for the most part fall into two camps, “namely ‘she forces a man (or her husband) to love her’ and ‘only when forced does she get married (or show love for her husband)’” (251). Gerber himself favors the first interpretation; he explains *philos* as “loving” and argues on stylistic grounds that line 62 goes less naturally with the lines that precede (“the list of activities she dislikes”) than with those that follow (“those which she enjoys,” sc. making herself beautiful so that a man can’t help but love her).

However, if *andra poieitai philon*, “she makes her husband her *philos*,” is understood as a euphemism for sex, and *anankê* as the coercion (implicit or otherwise) that the husband exerts upon his wife, then line 62 provides a seamless transition between what precedes and what follows. The horse-woman is fastidious about her body: she dislikes dirty household tasks; she performs her conjugal duties, but only because she has to; she bathes frequently (the Greek is even stronger: “she washes off the filth”) and rubs perfume on her skin. Wooley rightly (and tersely) suggests that *anankê* here “is better understood by comparing the *anankê* in line 44 (*mogis* [just barely; with difficulty]) and by seeing the statement about the Mare-Woman as in responson to that about the immediately preceding Cat-Woman [=weasel-woman] (line 53), who is man-crazy.” The husbands of both the ass-woman and the horse-woman must rely on *anankê* to keep their wives in line, though the types of compulsion involved no doubt differ in degree and kind. When it comes to sex, the weasel-woman is eager but unappealing; the horse-woman is attractive but reluctant. On the horse-woman’s prissiness, see Verdenius (1968) 145 on *habrê* in the Greek of line 57, which he translates “üppig”; see also his notes on line 62 (1968, 146-7; 1977, 6-7).

Campbell (1967) and Lloyd-Jones favor the interpretation of Lattimore (1944), “she makes her husband intimate with hard times.”

**Line 67 (68): “a pain.”** The word that I translate “pain” here and in lines 71 (72), 98 (96), and 118 (115) is in Greek *kakon*, “a bad thing,” the same word that Hesiod applies repeatedly to womankind (e.g. *Theogony* 570, 600 and *Works and Days* 88-89). The horse-woman is, like Pandora in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, a *kalon kakon*, “a beautiful bad thing” (*Theogony* 585; Semonides 67-68 [66-67 trans.]). Semonides applies *kakon* to women in this poem more often than is evident from my translation; women are called *kakon*, or doers of *kakon*, in the Greek of lines 55 (she does bad things to neighbors), 77 (“horrid woman”), 82 and 98 (“harm”) as well as in 72, 96, and 115.

**Line 86 (84): “stinging blame.”** Literally, “on her alone blame does not alight.” The verb is appropriate to a bee, as Campbell points out.

**Lines 121-22 (117-18): “the day that Hades opened up his gates / for all the men who fought that woman’s war.”** This is clearly a reference to Helen, the cause of the Trojan War; it is a fitting ending to a poem concerned with the multifarious wickedness of women in general, and their ill effect on guest-host relations in particular (see note on line 20 [19] above). Hades, the god of the underworld, is thought of in early Greek poetry as the ultimate host; he is called “welcomer of many,” “receiver of all,” “having many xenoi,” etc. See N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974) 145 (on *poludektê*, line 9) for a list of references. On the verb *dechomai* (“opened up his gates”) see the note on line 49 above.

Some editors have felt that Semonides’ poem as we have it is incomplete, because of the particles *te* and *men* in line 117 of the Greek, which can imply that there is more to follow. To others, including the present translator, the idea of a lost continuation seems unlikely. Campbell (1976) 98 and Renehan 13-15 argue strongly for the completeness of the poem.

In the beginning God made woman's mind apart from man's.<sup>11</sup>

One made He of a bristly Sow; all that is in her house lies disorderly, defiled with dirt, and rolling upon the floor, and she groweth fat a-sitting among the middens in garments as unwashed as herself.

Another did God make of a knavish Vixen, a woman knowing in all things, who taketh note of all, be it bad or good; for the bad often calleth she good and the good bad; and she hath now this mood and now that.

Another of a Bitch, a busybody<sup>12</sup> like her mother, one that would fain hear all, know all, and peering and prying everywhere barketh e'en though she see nothing; a man cannot check her with threats, no, not if in anger he dash her teeth out with a stone, nor yet though he speak gently with her, even though she be sitting among strangers —she must needs keep up her idle baying.

Another the Olympians fashioned of Earth, and gave to her husband all wanting in wits; such a woman knoweth neither evil nor good; her only art is to eat; and never though God give a bad winter draweth she her stool nigher the fire for the cold.

Another of the Sea, whose thoughts are in two minds; one day she laughs and is gay —a stranger seeing her within will praise her, saying ‘There's no better wife in all the world, nay, nor comelier’; the next she is intolerable to behold or draw nigh to, for then she rageth unapproachably, like a bitch with young; implacable and nasty is she to all, alike foe and friend. Even as the sea in summertime often will stand calm and harmless, to the great joy of the mariners, yet often will rage and toss with roaring waves, most like unto it is such a woman in disposition, nor hath the ocean a nature of other sort than hers.<sup>13</sup>



Another's made of a stubborn<sup>14</sup> and belaboured She-Ass; everything she doeth is hardly done, of necessity and after threats, and then 'tis left unfinished; meanwhile eateth she day in day out, in bower and in hall, and all men alike are welcome to her bed.

Another of a Cat, a woeful and miserable sort; for in her there's nought of fair or lovely or pleasant or desirable; she is wood<sup>15</sup> for a love-mate, and yet when she hath him turneth his stomach; she doeth her neighbours much harm underhand, and often eateth up unaccepted offerings.<sup>16</sup>

Another<sup>17</sup> is the child of a dainty long-maned Mare; she refuseth menial tasks and toil; she'll neither set hand to mill nor take up sieve, nor cast forth the muck, nor, for that she shunneth the soot, will she sit beside the oven. She taketh a mate only of necessity. Every day will she wash herself twice, or even thrice, and anointeth her with unguents. She ever weareth her hair deep-combed and wreathed with flowers. Such a wife may be a fair sight for other men, but she's an ill to her husband if he be not a despot or a king, such as take pride in adornments like to her.

Another cometh of an Ape; she is the greatest ill of all Zeus giveth man. Foul of face, such a woman maketh laughter for all men as she goeth through the town; short in neck, she moveth hardly, hipless, leanshanked —alas for the wretched man that claspeth such a mischief! Like an ape she knoweth all arts and wiles, nor recketh of men's laughter. Neither will she do a man any kindness; all her care, all her considering, is how she shall do the greatest ill she may.

Another of a Bee; and happy he that getteth her. On her alone alighteth there no blame, and life doth flourish and increase because of her; loving and loved groweth she old with her husband, the mother of a fair and name-honoured progeny; she is pre-eminent among all the women, and a divine grace pervadeth her; neither taketh she delight in sitting among women where they tell tales of venery. Such wives are the best and wisest that Zeus bestoweth upon men; these other kinds, thanks unto Him, both are and will ever be a mischief in the world.

For this is the greatest ill that Zeus hath made, women. Even though they may seem to advantage us, a wife is more than all else a mischief to him that possesseth her; for whoso dwelleth with a woman, he never passeth a whole day glad, nor quickly shall he thrust out of doors Hunger the hated housefellow and hostile deity. But when a man thinketh withindoors to be gladdest at heart by grace of God or favour of man, then of all times will she find cause for blame and gird herself for battle. For where a woman is, they e'en cannot receive a stranger heartily. And she that most seemeth to be discreet, she is all the time doing the greatest harm; her husband is all agape for her, but the neighbours rejoice that yet another is deceived. And no man but will praise his own wife when he speaketh of her,<sup>18</sup> and blame another's, yet we cannot see<sup>19</sup> that we be all alike. Aye, this is the greatest ill that

Zeus hath made, this hath he put about us as the bondage of a fetter irrefragable, ever since Death received them that went a-warring for a woman.<sup>20</sup>

11 or made mind apart from woman

12 the mss have λιτοργόν, a form which occurs nowhere else and is prob. corrupt.; two ancient glosses prob. belong here; one, λίταργον, explained by ‘running fast,’ seems etymologically unsound, the other, λιτουργόν [ λειτουργόν ?], explained by ‘scoundrelly,’ can hardly have that meaning; but the latter, besides its official use as ‘doer of public works,’ may have had the meaning given above

13 or keeping the Greek but the ocean hat a different nature

14 reading doubtful

15 mad

16 cf. Ath. 5. 179 d [ π. τῆς ἀκόσμου γυνακὸς ]

17 11. 57-70 are also in Ael. H.A. 16. 24, cf. 11. 36

18 not when he remembers her after her death (which would be put more explicitly)

19 or, emending the Gk. we know well

20 Helen, cf. Hes. Op. 165 ff